

All the World's Governments

From democrats to dictators and princes to parliaments, here's a guide to governing the world

BY JANET REITMAN

How many times have you turned on the evening news and heard something like this: "Good evening. President Sadistic Insane, the newly installed dictator of Sadistovania, declared today that he would not pull his troops back from the border with neighboring Happyland. In Washington, the President denounced Insane, and urged that he remove the

troops and restore democracy to Sadistovania. Meanwhile, Happyland's prime minister said he may ask for UN intervention."

Democracy, dictatorship? President, prime minister? These are the common terms and phrases people everywhere use to describe different forms of government and the leaders who head them. But what exactly do they mean? What is a democracy or a dictatorship? Are there other forms of

governments out there that will pop up in the news next week?

Just as a visitor to a strange city needs a travel guide, so you, the savvy consumer of news, need a road map to our world tour of governments. Here then are the basics, to help you get oriented.

We'll start by defining government itself: How groups of people organize and govern themselves by choosing laws, institutions, leaders, and common customs. As you will discover, there are governments that don't fall easily into any of these categories. As in most things, there are shades of gray, and nations that mix and match different elements of different governments. But these are the main stopping points on our tour.

Democracy

Our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln, perhaps defined democracy best in his 1863 Gettysburg Address. Democracy, Lincoln said, is a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." A democracy is a government ruled directly by its citizens, as expressed by the majority opinion of the people.

As a concept, democracy dates from the ancient Greeks. As an actuality, it dates to American and French revolutions of the 18th century. The United States, which symbolizes democracy for most of the world, is a



BRITISH PRIME MINISTER TONY BLAIR. HIS LABOR PARTY CONTROLS THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT.

republic. The hallmarks of republics are their **representative** form of government: citizens run for public office, vote in elections, and have the power to evict public officials from office; a free press and freedom of speech are also essentials of democratic governments. Our form of democracy is called a **presidential-legislative democracy**, since power is shared by an elected legislature (the Congress) and an elected President.

(The government of France is called a **presidential-parliamentary democracy**, because power is shared by an elected parliament and an elected president.)

Parliamentary Democracy

Parliamentary governments are headed by an elected legislature—usually called a **parliament**—and a cabinet. The leader of the cabinet is called the **prime minister**, or premier. Unlike U.S. Presidents, prime ministers are chosen by the political party that controls parliament, not by the public. Great Britain's prime minister, Tony Blair, will keep his job for as long as his party, the Labor Party, is in power. That is because citizens of parliamentary governments vote only for a political party expressing a certain set of political views and not for an individual candidate for prime minister.

Dictatorship

Most people know a dictator and a dictatorship when they see one. Adolf Hitler, the leader of Nazi Germany during the 1930s and 1940s, is perhaps the most notorious dictator of all time. More recent examples include the leader of Libya, Muammar al-Qaddafi, and of Cuba, Fidel Castro.

Dictators hold absolute power over their citizens, and make, and often break, laws as they see fit. The use of brutality and tightfisted control of economic activity and the press are also typical of dictatorships. There are different types of dictatorships:

Libya, for example, is usually described as a **military dictatorship**, meaning that the country is led by one military leader or a small group of leaders, known as a **junta**. Iraq is called a **one-party dictatorship**, because all power is held by one political party. There are also presidential dictatorships, such as exist in Peru, and Communist dictatorships, such as North Korea and Cuba.

Communism

Until recently, the first form of government most students learned about after democracy was Communism. As practiced in countries like the Soviet Union (now Russia) and East Germany (now part of Germany), Communism was considered to be the main alternative—and threat—to representative democracy.

Derived from the writings of the 19th-century German philosopher Karl Marx, Communist governments traditionally advocated an end to private ownership of business, equal distribution of wealth, and the coming to power of the working class or "proletariat" over the "bourgeois" (middle and rich) classes or ruling elite.

Although many early Communists envisioned an open and liberated society, most Communist governments in this century became dictatorships. A small group of people, usually from one ruling Communist party, totally controlled the state, the economy, the press, even housing and the movement of citizens.

In 1985, the Soviet Union and most of its Communist allies collapsed, effectively ending Communism as a worldwide form of government. Only China, Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam, and Laos remain.

Totalitarianism

Totalitarian governments are those in which the state takes complete control. The rights of citizens in totalitar-



KING JIGME WANGCHUCK, ABSOLUTE MONARCH OF THE KINGDOM OF BHUTAN IN ASIA.

ian societies come second to the interest of the state. There are no limits on the extent of totalitarian governments' jurisdiction over everyday life. Usually controlled by a small group of individuals, totalitarian countries put down all opposition and seek to regulate, if not destroy, the traditional institutions of society, such as family, religion, corporations, and labor unions. Nazi Germany was a totalitarian state; the Soviet Union was another during various periods of its existence.

Monarchy

Meet one of the oldest forms of government known to humanity. A **true monarchy** is a government ruled by a hereditary, king, queen, or emperor—for example, ancient Egypt, Japan, and most of Europe until the 18th century. A contemporary example is Saudi Arabia (see p. 6). Monarchs hold power for life, often are dictators, and pass their title on to their children or siblings.

A number of countries such as Great Britain, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Spain, maintain a form of **ceremonial monarchy**. As with Queen Elizabeth of Britain, they are figures of national unity and pride, but have absolutely no power to influence the running of government. There are also **constitutional monarchies**—an example is the African nation of Morocco—where the monarch's power is restricted by a written constitution.

Counting Countries

Nearly two-thirds of the earth's people live under democratic forms of government. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the number of countries that have become democracies has skyrocketed. Yet, 38% of the world's people still live under a military or one-party system. These charts and graphs show how the countries of the world are governed.

A Move toward Democracy

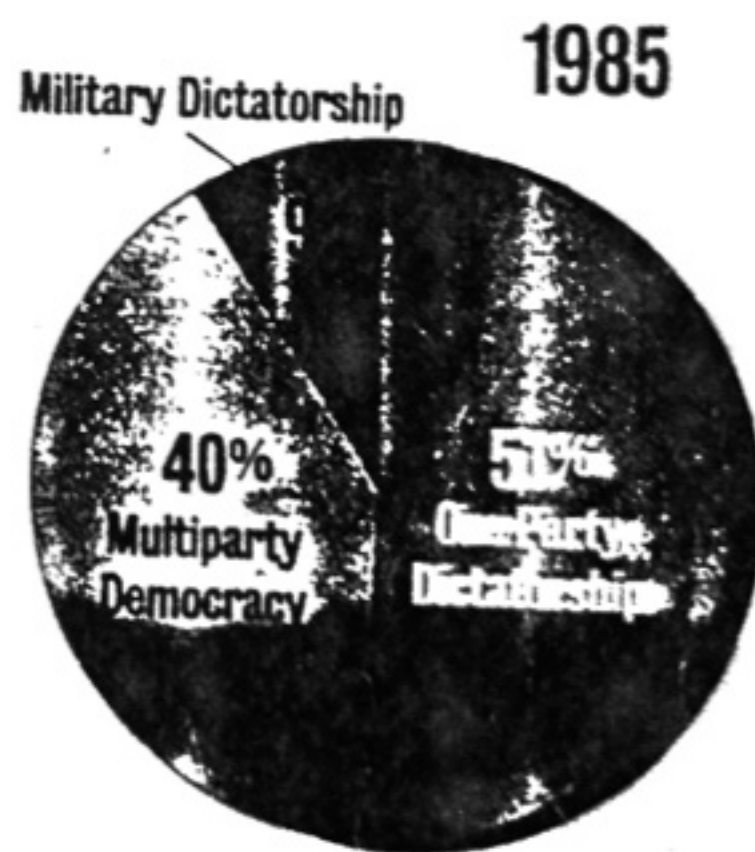
Number of democracies in the world

YEAR	NUMBER OF DEMOCRACIES	TOTAL COUNTRIES	PERCENT OF COUNTRIES THAT ARE DEMOCRACIES
1974	39	142	27.5%
1990	76	165	46.1%
1992	99	186	53.2%
1994	114	190	59.7%
1997	117	190	61.3%

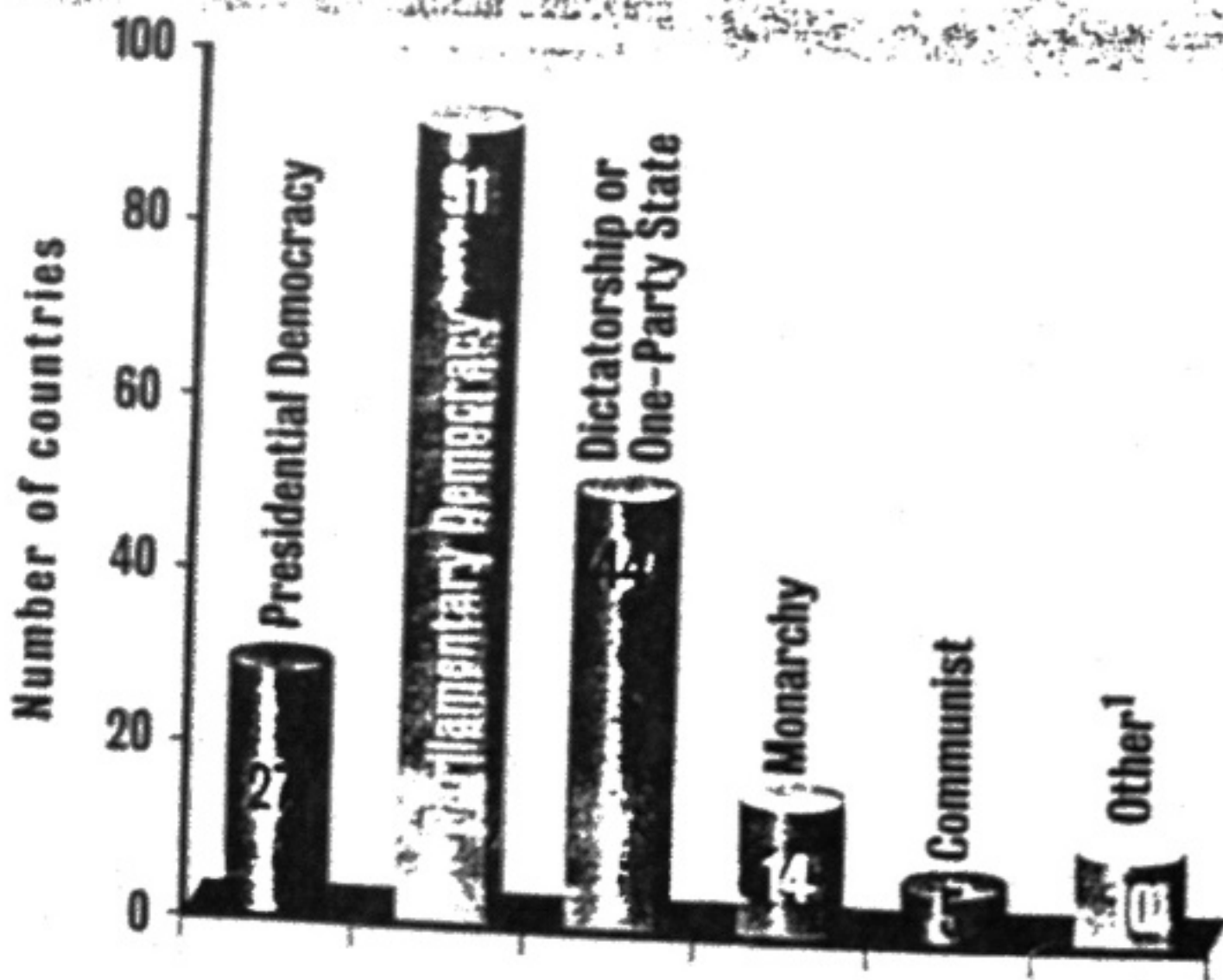
Source: Freedom in the World: 1995-1996, Freedom House: Annual Editions Comparative Politics 1997-98, DuSautoy/McGraw-Hill, 1997.

...And Away from Dictatorships

Percentage of the world's population living under different types of government



Governments of the World



¹No government or ruler) or in transition from one form of government to another.
Source: U.S. Department of State: Freedom in the World: 1995-1996, Freedom House.

Imagine A Perfect World

From the ancient Greeks to today's Trekkies, humans have always dreamed of the ideal government

BY JANET REITMAN

In the early 1960s, Gene Roddenberry, a young television scriptwriter and producer, whiled away his spare time imagining how earth, and hundreds of other

ed to the peaceful exploration of the universe. The crew of the *Enterprise* was a racially diverse group, dedicated to inter-galactic equality.

Imagined worlds and governments like Roddenberry's have been around for as long as human beings have existed. Since the ancient Greeks, people have dreamed of the perfect society. This form of thinking is called "utopian"—Greek for "nowhere"—and such imagined governments are called Utopias. The term is appropriate because no such perfect society has ever really existed. But utopian ideas have influenced nearly every current form of government.

A Perfect Society

The Greek philosopher Plato (427-347 B.C.) was the first to write about such a government. In his famous treatise *The Republic*, Plato described the ideal society as one free from extreme wealth or extreme poverty. "The material world is nebulous

and chaotic," he said. "Only the ideas we form bring order to the universe."

Plato's ideas influenced generations of thinkers, notably the British philosopher Thomas More (1477-1535). More's most famous book, *Utopia*, is still one of history's most influential political documents.

In *Utopia*, More describes an ideal society based on justice and equality for all. *Utopia* inspired an entire school of political thought, including early communism and anarchism.

In America, its influence reached a peak during the 19th century. More than 100 utopian communities were formed all over the U.S., as alternatives to the American government. The most famous was New Harmony, Indiana, which had 1,500 members and lasted from 1825 to 1860.

Ideas of the Future

While most such experiments eventually failed, they contributed ideas that would later be adopted both by government and society such as women's rights and freedoms and the abolition of slavery.

The utopian governments of the 19th century were mostly built in rural areas and reflected simple, rural values. As the world became more industrialized and complex, however, these utopian ideas were replaced by harsher philosophies such as Marxism and modern Communism (see page 13). And many thinkers began to warn that utopian thinking was dangerous and could lead to dictatorships. George Orwell's famous "counter-utopian" novel *1984* warned of just such a world.

Still, as any loyal Trekkie could tell you, as long as there are problems on earth today, and "strange new worlds" to ponder in the future, human beings will imagine a better government, a better world—and a better universe. ■



A UTOPIA OF THE FUTURE? THE CREW FROM STAR TREK VOYAGER.

UPN/JULIE DENNIS

planets, might be governed 300 years in the future.

Out of this dreaming came Roddenberry's idea for *Star Trek*—one of the most popular TV and movie series of all time. *Star Trek*, of course, imagined a harmonious United Federation of Planets, dedicat-

Democracy Unit.

All the World's Governments

Democracy, Dictatorship, Communism, Totalitarianism, Monarchy.

1. What is a "government?"
2. How did Abraham Lincoln define **democracy**?
3. Explain when **democracy** first became a concept, and later, an actuality.
4. Explain "**representative government**."
5. Explain **presidential-legislative democracy**.
6. Explain **presidential-parliamentary democracy**.
7. Explain **parliament**.
8. Explain **prime-minister**. How are prime-ministers chosen? How does this differ from the American system of electing the President?
9. Explain **dictator**. Give recent examples.
10. Explain **military dictatorship**.
11. Explain **one party dictatorship**.
12. Give an example of a **Presidential dictatorship**.
13. Give an example of a **Communist dictatorship**.
14. What did Communist governments traditionally advocate?
15. Communist countries turned out to be very different from how they were envisioned. Explain this statement.
16. Name the remaining Communist countries in today's world.
17. Describe how a totalitarian government controls its citizens, everyday life, and the traditional institutions of society.
18. Define **monarchy**. Give an example of both an ancient and a contemporary monarchy.
19. Explain **ceremonial ^{monarchy} democracy**. Give examples.
20. What is a **constitutional monarchy**? Give examples.

Counting Countries.

1. What percentages of people lived under military dictatorship, multi-party democracy, and one party dictatorships in 1985?
2. What percentages of people lived under military dictatorship, multiparty democracy, and one party dictatorships in 1997?
3. How many governments practice parliamentary democracy, presidential democracy, one-party state democracies?
4. How many democracies existed ~~there~~ in 1990, 1992 and 1997?
5. Draw a **line graph** to represent the information from the upper left hand chart, "A Move toward Democracy," on page 11. Include the information on the **number of democracies** and on the **percentage of countries that are democracies**?

Imagine A Perfect World

1. Describe what for you would be a perfect "**utopia**." Use the following categories: political structure, economic system, religion, education, and social structure and life.